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CAN WE AFFORD TO RULE SUBJECT PEOPLES?

BY

FELIX ADLER.

Extracts from an Address delivered before the Society for Ethical Culture, March 18, 1900.

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I plead the duty to-day for everyone not to decide upon this great question hastily, but to reflect, and, so far as he or she is able, try and influence the decision of the American people in the right direction I plead for deliberation; for the forecasting of consequences. I plead that that precious instrument of deliberation, the kindliest aid for wise counsel and wise action, should not be insidiously wrested from our grasp; because that is what those are trying to do, who would commit us to the policy of ruling subject races, and they try to urge upon us that discussion is of no use. They try to wrest the deliberation from our grasp, and it is not a sign of the strength of their position, but it is the plan which so many of them pursue. Therefore, before I consider the pros and cons of the question itself, I want to brush away some of these arguments which are used, having for their object to cut off discussion and extinguish deliberation.

In the first place it is said, "It is too late—the Philippines are ours, for good or evil. What is the use of

further discussing the policy. The milk is spilled, what is the use of crying? You might just as well battle with your naked hands against an iron door to make it yield as to protest against the *fait accompli*—the accomplished fact." This is false. We do possess the Philippines, but the question of what we are to do with them is open. Congress has not yet decided—no one has decided. There are still four possible courses open to us: We might to-day give up possession; we might retire and leave the inhabitants of the Archipelago to their own devices. I think that very few persons would advocate that course. Certainly I am not among the number. Then we might organize them into territories, with a view of finally admitting them as states. I think that there are very few who would advocate that policy. At all events, I am not of that number. Then there are the real alternatives—to rule over them as a subject people, or to prepare them for independence. That is the question that I propose to discuss to-day. These are the two alternative courses; to decide that they shall be ours—our subjects—or that we must be their stay and prop until such time as they can stand alone, but with the declared and avowed intention that that time shall come; that we shall prepare and educate them for it; that it is our aim and object to make them independent. Subjection or independence. Not necessarily immediate independence, but independence, finally, on the one hand; subjection on the other. That is the alternative upon which the American people must decide. I would that it were more clearly stated throughout the length and breadth of the land.

This first argument, thus, that the matter is all decided, and that the discussion is a belated one, is false. Another argument that is often used is that whether, ostensibly, the question is open or not, really, in effect,

the thing is decided; that there is a tendency among the American people to get possession and to keep it, and that that tendency is final. There are quite a number of learned gentlemen to-day who are studying this doctrine. Here is one: "Instincts which control the action of masses of men respond to appropriate stimuli with a regularity that suggests little dependence on argument and deliberation. The crisis came and we acted as our impulse dictated. The consciousness of power as naturally expresses itself in self-assertion as the consciousness of weakness expresses itself in submission." It is, thus, the doctrine of the irresponsibility of the masses. But I confess that this doctrine, with its exaltation of impulse, does not appear to me either a very new or a very respectable one; nor does it appear to me as one which should be met on theoretical grounds chiefly. Rather does the appeal lie to the facts. As a matter of fact, is there such a thing as a national conscience, or is there not? Are we to say that nations, any more than individuals, have the right to dress up their covetousness and their cupidity, and call them manifest destiny? There are these impulses, and they are strong; but there are also counter impulses that have for their effect to safeguard deliberation, and deliberation has for its effect to bring into view our ulterior and lasting interests, in contrast with the desire of the moment, and the interests and rights of others which we are bound to respect. Manifest destiny is only a more grandiloquent term for manifest temptation, but it does not mean that we are bound to succumb.

But now, after this preliminary review of the arguments which are intended to cut off deliberation, let us consider the two alternative courses—either of holding these people in subjection, or the other. And what are

the reasons advanced in favor of ruling subject races? The first reason is the commercial reason. I am afraid the trail of commercialism is over our Phillippine war. Says the Senator from Indiana: "The Phillippines are ours forever, and beyond them is China and its illimitable markets, and we will not retract from either." Says the Washington *Post*: "Why not tell the truth and say what is the fact—that we want Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and Luzon, and any other islands in either ocean that may hereafter commend themselves to our appetite, because we believe they will add to our national strength, and because we hope they will some day become purchasers at our bargain counter. We might as well throw off the pious mask." Yes, indeed, they might as well throw off the pious mask. The sickening, sanctimonious use of humanitarian phrases is, at any rate, more repulsive than this rank brutality. Are the sanctimonious phrases that cover the commercial motive going to deceive us? Commercial increase is very well; no one objects to that. New markets, large sales—we are not opposing legitimate expansion; but is commercial expansion to be purchased at the expense of every principle of right and justice? It is not even true that we need the Philippines; that it will be to our interest to have them. On purely commercial grounds, it is a bad investment. How many millions more shall we have to spend before we subjugate the islands, and in order to keep them subjugated? How many millions in order to protect that vast sea coast from foreign invasion. Then consider what ex-Secretary Olney has pointed out—that we cannot develop these resources of the Philippines unless we employ coolie labor. If that be so, shall we who have abolished slavery in our own country return to a modified form of slavery in the Philippines? The outcome of it

all is that from the purely commercial point of view, the possession of the Phillippines would be of advantage to a limited number of speculating capitalists, unquestionably; but it would yield no advantage, only disadvantage commercially to the American people.

An honest argument in favor of going into this business is that we need it for our instruction, for our education. Even Mr. Olney, who does not approve of the plan, seems to think that there is this advantage, that we are going to be less provincial. But does it not seem to you that we are already fairly leaving provincialism behind us, and that our horizon is widening by natural development? We were provincial because we lacked culture. The more culture advances, the more we shall have provincialism behind us. Is it necessary for us to engage in strife with other nations in order to broaden our human sympathy? Is it necessary to knock a man down in order to make his better acquaintance?

Now, the great argument—the one that has had the most influence: "We must follow the example of England." That has had the greatest effect in turning people in the direction of this new departure. "The example of England." England is the born ruler of subject peoples, and England is virtually, it is said, a democracy. What England has done, cannot we do? Now, it is not true that England is virtually a democracy. There are two points to be considered. We want to ask ourselves, "Can we do what England has done?" And then, "Ought we to do it, even if we could?" Now, can we do it? The government of England is not like the government of the United States. There is still in England a very strong monarchical feeling. Then there is the attitude of deference towards one's social betters. That is decision. That is present

in England and lacking with us: and this brings it about that the heirs of ancient families feel a certain position and exercise a certain influence, both politically and socially, which we must understand, because it is vital to the understanding of the difference between England and America. These representatives of ancient families form a permanent class of rulers. They are born to rule. There is a class of permanent rulers, born rulers; and, what is much more important, they are the nucleus of a larger body of rulers. This aristocracy of birth attracts to itself the aristocracy of intellect, and holds up the whole class of English rulers to a certain standard of integrity and efficiency. Now, how is it with us? We have not anything of the kind. We shift our rulers every few years. With us the people are the rulers—we have no class of permanent rulers at all, no people in power all the time. Now, what is the effect of this? In the first place, the people consist of men who are absorbed in their private interests, and who have not the time to devote to the business of government; and then those persons whom we elect to do the governing for us, they are only allowed to do it for a very short time, and when they get into power the first thing they have to consider is to requite the services of those who put them into power, with the offices in their gift; and very often, also, to secure the allegiance of those who can re-elect them to power. It is not that we are worse than England, that we are less moral and less capable. I do not think so for a moment. It is that our experiment is more difficult. What we are trying to do is vastly more difficult. We are trying to get along without a permanent class of rulers. England can bring the good men, the able men, to the front; but we have no such nucleus of permanent rulers. Well, here is our Phillippine Commission, with President Schurmann,

and it says that if we are going to govern the Philippines we must have men of the very highest class, pure, public-spirited, efficient. We must pay them high salaries, we must keep them in office permanently; and there is only one thing that this Commission has failed to tell us—how in the world we are going to get these men, and how we are going to keep them; how, under present conditions, we are going to get such men appointed, in the long run?

Now, suppose we take up the other question, and say, "Ought we to do what England has done?" I do not think we ought, even if we could. The reason is this: that England has been successful in conferring certain palpable benefits upon subjects races, but she has not been successful in conferring what we must consider the highest benefit. The highest benefit has been sacrificed to certain immediate benefits. The British rule in India has been successful in certain ways. The British have secured peace. They have secured impartial administration of justice in courts of law. They have built railroads. They have begun to tackle the problem of education, but it is far too early to say that they have been successful. Some of the wisest statesmen of England to-day are of the opinion that it might have been better for their country never to have touched India. Four-fifths of the population are still poor. The British are encamped in India as in a hostile land. And chief of all—the principal point of all—the English have not at all succeeded in stimulating self-government in India. The efforts in that direction seem to have met with very little success. Their rule is autocratic. They rule by force. They confer the palpable benefits—but the chief benefit they do not confer, which is the stimulating among people of the desire to work out their own salvation, to manage their own

affairs. It is far better for a people to learn to manage its own affairs, even if it is at the sacrifice of certain of the benefits of good government; better to have less good government, and more of the power, gradually acquired, of securing in the end good government. That is the great point, and in respect to that I believe it is admitted by all concerned, English rule in India has not been a success. Now, so far as we are concerned, we cannot adopt that method. We cannot rule autocratically. We cannot adopt the method of force. We cannot merely hold these people in subjection and say, "In return for the birthright which you sell us we will give you these palpable benefits." Autocracy and liberty cannot dwell together in the same political household. Autocracy is possible for the English without serious results upon their home government, because even their home government is essentially aristocratic; but subjection in the Philippines and liberty in the United States would not be possible. The reaction upon our own affairs, upon our own method of rule, of government at home, is what we most need to fear. Already there are those in our midst who are sneering at the idea that government should rest on the consent of the governed, and who have proposed an amendment to that principle, viz: that government should rest on the consent of part of the governed, namely, of course, the wealthy part, the powerful part, the favored part. Let us rule in the Philippines without the consent of the governed, and we shall strengthen in our own midst those forces that believe in ruling without the consent of all the governed. Let us rule subject peoples in the Philippines, and the next thing will be the proposition to rule subject classes in the United States—the poor, uneducated and what not, they will be classed with those whose consent is unneces-

sary, and we shall have a struggle. I do not say that we shall succumb in that struggle, but we shall have a struggle in our own midst, the portentous evils of which I, for one, care not even in imagination to face. We cannot afford it—cannot afford it commercially; we do not need it. It would be a mistake. For the sake of escaping provincialism, that is folly. For the sake of our own government, for the sake of maintaining that principle that government must rest on the consent of all the governed, we cannot afford to violate that principle. If we violate it once we shall simply open the door to further violation, and the very thing that we have stood for among the nations will be gone.

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